

At times, the climate of a particular group may simply be too threatening for women to attend safely. Again, **trust your judgment** and do what you need to do to take care of yourself and your recovery. Here are some suggestions for working on your recovery if you are unable to attend your local meeting, either temporarily or permanently:

- 1) Contact the International Service Organization's Women's Outreach Committee through our webpage at www.saa-women.org or through our email at grace@saa-women.org, or your local intergroup, or for a female penpal or women volunteers who can sponsor you by email or phone. Support is available for "loners" who cannot attend meetings.
- 2) Participate in women-only or mixed telemeetings, which are available every day of the week. Visit www.saa-recovery.org for more information on telemeetings and online meetings.
- 3) Consider starting a women's - only SAA group in your area.
- 4) Consider attending open meetings of other 12 step fellowships in your area.
- 5) Read literature on women in recovery and listen to tapes from recovering female sex addicts.
- 6) Work with a sponsor you trust even if you cannot attend meetings safely. Your recovery comes first! In general, group experience has shown that "unsafe" people who are not really interested in recovery do not find what they are looking for at SAA and do not tend to stay with the group for long. Therefore, if at all possible, we urge you to hang in there, keep in close contact with safe group members, take care of yourself, and trust the process. As a final note, some women feel uncomfortable placing their phone numbers on the group phone list, which is distributed to newcomers and other members. No one is required to put their number on the list. You may choose, instead, to give your phone number out only to trusted members whom you select.

VII. Coping With Inappropriate Comments/Feedback/ Behavior

Under normal circumstances, you and your group can weather occasional bumps by trusting in a Higher Power and the process of recovery. Since we are all sex addicts suffering from the same disease and imperfect human beings, it is quite possible that any of us could behave inappropriately at some point or another. This is especially true in early recovery, when many of us need to learn new, healthier boundaries around our talk and behavior. Examples of less serious but still inappropriate behavior include making sexual jokes or graphic comments, crosstalk in a meeting, or hugging inappropriately. If the person behaving inappropriately is an otherwise trusted member of the group, you may feel safe confronting him/her directly (which can be a healthy and positive experience for everyone's recovery!). We recommend checking this out with your sponsor ahead of time and/or asking your sponsor to be present when confronting another member, however. We also recommend being open to feedback from your sponsor regarding your own behavior in the group.

VIII. Choosing a Sponsor

Finally, when selecting a sponsor, we suggest that you choose someone for whom you do not feel any attraction or intrigue. Choosing a sponsor is critical for providing support and guidance through the program. Be selective; you need to protect yourself and your recovery. For most women, another woman is the best sponsor, especially in early recovery. In groups with few female sponsors to choose from, our experience has been that many women have found excellent sponsors in gay male members. You may also consider contacting the ISO Women's Outreach Committee at grace@saa-women.org to be added to the SAA Women's Outreach List and connect with women who may sponsor you. Your local intergroup may also have a list of potential women sponsors in your area. A good general guideline is to choose a sponsor whose recovery you respect. Consider someone who has been in the program at least one year, who has worked the Twelve Steps, and with whom you do not feel any sexual vibes whether the prospective sponsor is female, transgender, or male; lesbian, bisexual, gay, or straight.

IX. Hugs and Physical Contact

At many meetings, it is customary to close by standing in a circle holding hands and to recite a prayer (usually the Serenity Prayer or the Lord's Prayer). Some groups may stand in a circle with their arms around each other. Whatever form the closing may take, it is a symbol of our unity and mutual support in recovery from sexual addiction. However, many people, especially women, may be uncomfortable with this physical contact, especially at first. Others may be uncomfortable with the prayer. No one is required to participate. It is perfectly acceptable to remain silent, to stand outside the circle, or to hold hands rather than put your arms around oth-

ers, as you choose. After the meeting, many members voluntarily exchange hugs. You have a right to refuse hugs and to be selective about hugs. It is perfectly all right to accept a hug from one member, shake hands with another, and avoid all physical contact with a third. Trust your intuition; you have the right to say no. If anybody pressures you, back off, and find somebody else to talk to, such as your sponsor. In recovery, we learn to take responsibility for ourselves and to set boundaries with our physical bodies. Meetings are a safe place to learn to practice setting those boundaries. Many of us have found that at the beginning of recovery, we were uncomfortable with hugs and other physical contact, because we did not know how to hug in a non sexualized way or in a way that did not make us feel like victims of another's sexual desires. Over time, as we learned to set and trust our own boundaries, we became more comfortable hugging. We discovered that when hugs are a choice, rather than an obligation or a compulsion, they can feel very different, and can even feel good! Be patient with yourself in learning to make this choice.

In addition, some of us have used seductive physical contact as part of our addictive behavior. Therefore, restraint is recommended. Be aware that some men may choose not to hug you or other women at meetings and need to protect their boundaries as well. A good guideline when in doubt is to ask first, and then to give a shoulder hug rather than a full - body hug.

Additional SAA Women's Outreach Resources:

There is a Woman's Outreach page on our website: www.saa-recovery.org To be added to the SAA Women's Outreach Network, send an email to:

grace@saa-women.org

Audio Recordings & Literature on Women and Sex Addiction and Literature on women and sex addiction is available.

Ask your sponsor for recommendations.

Many groups have recovery tapes and literature available for sale or loan. Audio recordings and literature can also be ordered directly from the International Service Organization of SAA.

Contact: ISO of SAA, Inc.

P.O. Box 70949

Houston TX 77270

(713) 869-4902 or 1-800-477-8191

Web: www.saa-recovery.org

Email: Info@saa-recovery.org

Some Suggested Guidelines (Summary)

1. Come to at least six meetings within six weeks.
2. Read program literature.
3. Get a temporary sponsor. We recommend choosing someone you feel safe with and to whom you do not feel attracted
4. Talk to others - at meetings, after the meeting, between meetings. Use the phone list and call others for support if you are feeling a compulsion to act out.
5. Use the Serenity Prayer,
6. Make a preliminary list of "Inner circle" behaviors (see pamphlet on "The Three Circles").
7. Put your recovery first. Don't let others pressure you into silence
8. You are as entitled to recovery as anyone else in the meeting.
9. You have a right to set comfortable physical boundaries at meetings.
10. Be gentle with yourself. Do not expect an overnight cure.
11. Give yourself credit for being the incredibly brave person you are
12. Keep coming back! We're glad you're here and we look forward to walking the path of recovery with you.

Tri County Recovery

A Special Welcome to the
Woman Newcomer
From Other Women Members of
SAA

Conference Approved May 2000 Revision: May 2007

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SAA

From Shame to Grace

Path to Healing and Recovery

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If this is your first time at a mixed gender SAA meeting, you will probably notice immediately, as you look around the room, that you are in a minority. You may, in fact, be the only woman in the room. Please be aware that you are in the right place. SAA is a relatively young fellowship, formed in 1977. Sex addicts in recovery often feel stigmatized in much the same way that alcoholics were in the early years of Alcoholics Anonymous. The stigma for female sex addicts can be even greater than it is for male addicts, just as it was for female alcoholics in the early years of AA. The fact that there are few other women in the room does not mean that you don't fit in, that you couldn't possibly be a sex addict, or that this program can't work for you. It does mean that you are a female pioneer in recovery from sexual addiction. The percentage of women members will continue to grow as more and more women like yourself look for recovery from sexually addictive behavior. Be aware that there are many other courageous SAA women out there. We recommend you read literature on women and sex addiction, listen to tapes from recovering female sex addicts, and hang in there. You are not alone.

Introduction Welcome!

You have taken a brave step walking in the door today, and we support your search for recovery. If you have a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior of any type, you are welcome here. We urge you to give our program a try. It has helped many other women of all ages, backgrounds, and sexual orientation find recovery from sexual addiction.

Because the first meeting can feel overwhelming, we recommend coming to at least six meetings in the first six weeks before deciding whether SAA is for you. Be gentle with yourself and give yourself time to listen to others stories and to absorb the introductory literature. If you are like most of us, you did not get to where you are overnight. It will also take time to orient yourself to this program and this new way of life's recovery.

Obsession, fantasy, promiscuity, compulsive masturbation, use of pornography, exhibitionism, voyeurism, abusive sex with self or others, addictive relationships, and/or other sexual acting out behaviors were quick fixes for the pain in our lives. These led, however, to ever more pain, shame, and isolation, in a vicious circle. In recovery, we learn to break that cycle and to live in the light of reality. We learn a completely new way of life, based on spiritual principles. We do not offer a quick fix or a cure for addiction. We have found, however, that as we embarked on the adventure of recovery, our shame and compulsions lessened, or were removed. One day at a time, we learned honesty, self-love, and integrity, and enjoyed the acceptance, love, and fellowship of those who understood us as few others could.

Some Special Concerns for the Woman Newcomer Attending Mixed Meetings

1. Being the Only Woman in the room

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The percentage of women members will continue to grow as more and more women like yourself look for recovery from sexually addictive behavior. Be aware that there are many other courageous SAA women out there. We recommend you read literature on women and sex addiction, listen to tapes from recovering female sex addicts, and hang in there. You are not alone.

II. Speaking at Meetings

Being a woman at a predominantly male meeting can be uncomfortable. Many women feel uncomfortable speaking in front of men at all. The challenge can be even greater when speaking honestly about sexual issues and behaviors, as we do in SAA. Many men are uncomfortable sharing, too, but the urge to keep silent can be especially strong for women, who are so often raised to defer to men. Of course, you do not have to speak at meetings and are always free to pass if you prefer. Our experience has shown, however, that the shame and compulsivity associated with sexual addiction can best be healed by sharing openly with others who understand and accept us as we are. If you are uncomfortable speaking at meetings, we strongly encourage you to talk with a member one-to-one after the meeting, to get a sponsor, and to use the phone list between meetings. Remember: you have a right to speak. You have already shown great bravery in coming to this meeting, and we urge you not to let the predominance of men at the meeting keep you from participating fully in this lifesaving program. Your recovery depends on it.

III. Triggering Others at Meetings

Some women, both straight and lesbian, are uncomfortable sharing at meetings for fear of triggering others present and attracting unwanted sexual attention. In addition, many of us come to SAA burdened by the belief that we are responsible for the sexual feelings and behaviors of others. In SAA, we learn to be accountable for our own feelings and behaviors, and to let go of unhealthy responsibility for others.

Let us stress that the issue of triggering others is a concern for all members of a group. Because of the nature of our addiction, it is unrealistic to assume that no one will ever be triggered at a meeting. Instead, it's how we cope with the triggers that is decisive. Here are some suggestions:

- 1) When in doubt, share with a sponsor first outside the meeting.
- 2) Put your own recovery first. Share those details you need to share for the sake of your recovery, and let others be responsible for their reactions to your sharing.

Some of us have found it helpful to think of sharing at meetings as "sharing with God." Your Higher Power will not get triggered!

- 3) By the same token, take responsibility for yourself if you feel triggered by someone else's sharing. For example, you can take care of yourself by leaving the room temporarily, praying for the other person's well-being, talking with another member after the meeting, or talking with your sponsor; expect others to do the same for themselves, if necessary.

As to the level of detail in our sharing, this needs to be worked out over time by each individual (and each group). For example, many group members feel it is inappropriate and unnecessarily triggering to share graphic details of specific fantasies or encounters. Most groups also recommend using "textbook" language for sexual behaviors and body parts rather than slang. Nevertheless, in order to release our shame, it is often necessary to share precisely those details we have always kept secret. A sponsor can help you determine if it is best to share these details within the meeting or one on one with your sponsor outside the meeting.

Bottom line: Fear of triggering others should never keep you from enjoying the benefits of working the SAA program. You are entitled to recovery as much as anyone else in the meeting.

IV. Being Attracted to Others at Meetings

Some of us do feel superficially comfortable at predominantly male meetings, for a variety of reasons. For example, if we have experienced abuse by women in the past, we may feel more safe with men in general. For many straight women, our acting out patterns led us to identify with men much more than with women; other women were seen as uninteresting at best or threats to our supply of men at worst. Indeed, for many of us, male sex addicts were "the drug of choice." The predominantly male atmosphere at meetings may feel at least familiar for these reasons.

Some women may feel attracted to others at the meeting, especially if we have acted out with other sex addicts as part of our addictive pattern. Such feelings of

attraction are an aspect of being "triggered." If this is the case for you, be gentle with yourself. You are not abnormal. In recovery, we learn to cope with the familiar triggers in a new, healthier way. We learn how to relate to other sex addicts in a safe, non sexualized way, which can be of enormous benefit to our overall recovery.

Regardless of your sexual orientation or acting out patterns - if you do feel triggered by anyone at the meeting, we encourage you to hang in there. We encourage you to speak to trusted members of the group or a sponsor about your feelings, thereby reducing the shame and obsession. We encourage you to pray and to surrender your feelings to a Higher Power ("turn it over"). If the situation feels safe, you may even choose to disclose the attraction to the person triggering you in order to further reduce the secrecy of your addiction. A sponsor can help you determine whether disclosure would increase or decrease the potential for unhealthy intrigue at this stage of your recovery. If you and your sponsor decide to disclose, we strongly recommend praying first, and disclosing the attraction with your sponsor or other trusted group members present.

V. Attending Meetings with Perpetrators

Many women feel uncomfortable attending meetings at which perpetrators of incest, child molesting, or other sex offenses are present. This is a natural fear, usually stemming from a woman's own experience of past sexual abuse. It is also exacerbated by the common fear of child molesters. The SAA program, however, places principles above personalities and does not distinguish between sex addicts on the basis of the acting out behaviors which brought us to SAA. Thus, sex addicts of all different types are represented at any one meeting. Over time, many of us have discovered that we share more commonalities than differences, and have even found inspiration and healing in the example of perpetrators who are breaking the cycle of abuse through this program. If you are uncomfortable at first, here are some suggestions:

- 1) Talk about your feelings with another member or your sponsor.
- 2) Tune out the people who make you uncomfortable - take what you like and leave the rest - and focus on others you feel more comfortable listening to.
- 3) Listen for feelings rather than behaviors - our actions may be different, but our feelings are usually similar.
- 4) Give yourself time. Before coming to SAA, most of us had never been around perpetrators who were not in denial about their perpetrating. This can be a challenging and unfamiliar experience. Expect some discomfort and give yourself time to adjust. It often helps to look at our discomfort - as an opportunity for growth in the program rather than as an obstacle.
- 5) Use the Serenity Prayer; ask your Higher Power for help, serenity, courage, and wisdom. Or pray for those in the meeting who make you most uncomfortable.
- 6) If strong - feelings of fear, anxiety, or anger persist, you may choose to work on these issues with a private therapist or in another group focusing specifically on recovery from sexual abuse or incest. SAA cannot endorse or refer you to another group or therapist. However, our collective experience suggests that sex addiction is almost always linked to some form of childhood abuse, sexual or otherwise. Whatever your feelings, they are normal.

VI. Protecting Your Safety

It is one thing to experience uncomfortable feelings around perpetrators. It is another to actually be placed in a threatening situation. Some of us have, at times, felt directly intimidated, threatened, or harassed by another member of the group. This is not the norm at our meetings, but if it occurs, trust your judgment and take immediate steps to protect your safety.

We recommend that you do not under any circumstances agree to meet privately with other members who behave in a harassing, threatening, or seductive manner. As a newcomer, be aware that any attempt at seduction or flirtation by another member is completely inappropriate and threatening to your recovery. You are under no obligation to meet with such people or to respond to their advances. Be firm in avoiding them and in seeking out safe (non sexual) contacts for support and encouragement in early recovery. When in doubt, check it out with another member or your sponsor.